

Drought's end doesn't eradicate tree-killing insect

By Kathryn Reed

One incredibly wet winter will not rid the West of the beetle infestation that has devastated forests, especially in California where more than 102 million trees have died since 2010.

"Bark beetles are still there. They will hatch and fly in early summer. Then we'll expect to see additional mortality, but at what rate is anyone's guess," Chris Anthony, CalFire division chief, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

What to do with all that fuel remains an unknown. Leaving it in the forests creates a fire hazard. Removing it is a financial conundrum. Even the wood that can be harvested doesn't necessarily then have a home. Trees that come off federal or state land cannot be sold overseas unless they have been milled to a certain dimension prior to exporting. That in itself can be cost prohibitive.

According to the regional U.S. Forest Service office, lots of people in California have looked into the export issue and potential legislation, but the agency could not provide any new information. This is a federal issue. No one from Rep. Tom McClintock's office responded to an inquiry. He is the Republican congressman representing Lake Tahoe and a large swath of the Sierra in the House.

The U.S. is the world leader in the production of timber for industrial products, accounting for approximately 25 percent of world production, according to the U.S. Forest Service. China is a big consumer of wood from the U.S.

While the law was set up to protect the domestic market, it is

now a hindrance. There are no limits from private property when it comes to being able to export wood.

This dead wood doesn't have an unlimited shelf life in terms of having monetary value. Once it starts rotting, no one wants it. If it has been stained blue by the beetles, it's value is also diminished, sometimes to the point of being worthless.

"When you look at the massive amount of wood there is still not enough markets to utilize all of the dead material," Anthony said.

Biomass, while effective, is also not financially feasible. It's cheaper to generate energy other ways or to just use natural gas. That is one reason the plant between Tahoe City and Truckee never got built

"They've done some experimenting to cut down trees and burn them on site. It's not efficient and it's dangerous," South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The state has had a tree mortality task force since October 2015, which Anthony was on from November 2015-July 2016. It was set up as the beetles became prolific during the drought. It is comprised of state and federal agencies, local governments, utilities, and various stakeholders. The Lake Tahoe Basin has a task force regarding beetles, too.

Three types of bark beetles are indigenous to the Sierra Nevada: mountain pine beetles, Jeffrey pine beetles, and fir engraver beetles. The mountain pine beetle is the most aggressive.

A healthy tree is able to use pitch to stop beetles from burrowing under the bark. Drought weakens trees and they become defenseless. Eventually the beetle wins and the tree dies.

"It's hard to predict what level of mortality we will continue

to see,” Anthony said. “Overall, I expect to see the mortality rates decline over what they were the last five years, but there is this tremendous population of bark beetle. It takes trees time to get the vigor and strength to fend off bark beets. One good winter is not enough.”

Opinion: Calif.’s core budget problem is underspending

By Joe Mathews

We have reached the high holy days of California’s budget season, as our governor and Legislature decide which programs will gain life, and which will be sacrificed. And so, per tradition, our state’s ministers have begun their ritual sermons on the dangers of overspending.

They are preaching nonsense. California’s real problem is underspending.



Joe Mathews

Go ahead and dismiss this as blasphemy. After so many years of budget crises and big deficits, Californians have adopted a budget theology grounded in self-flagellation, even though our recent budgets contain small surpluses. You can probably

recite the catechism yourself: We're still sinners who spend too much on state services! Far more than we take in! So save us, Non-Denominational Higher Power, from our profligate selves with budget cuts or spending limits!

I am here to tell you that our overspending religion urgently needs reformation.

And that requires genuine revelation. Our state's tendency to produce big deficits is not caused by big spending. We have had big deficits because our state budget is based on volatile formulas that expand deficits in unpredictable ways. In fact, California has long been on par with other states in expenditures per capita and in spending as a percentage of state GDP. Nevertheless, we cling to our religious fear of overspending and take the cheaper path—which often costs the state more money in the long run.

The problems of underspending are most obvious when it comes to pension obligations. California governments and employees have long spent too little money on contributions to pension funds. So, to catch up to our pension obligations, California taxpayers are having to make much bigger contributions now, which takes money away from critical services like schools and health care.

The costliness of underspending is also the story behind rising public higher education costs in California. Over generations, the state has cut back its relative contribution to the University of California and California State University systems. This underspending has been made up for in part with ever-higher tuition fees for students.

While overspending may be the stated enemy, underspending gets you into more trouble. The UC is under siege now for underspending—an audit found \$100 million-plus in secret reserves. The state parks department had a similar secret reserve scandal in 2012. Underspending in California's

overcrowded prisons was so bad the federal courts forced the state to spend more and reduce the prison population.

Underspending also explains problems with our basic services. Studies have found that the state spends tens of billions less on schools than would be necessary to provide all Californians with an adequate education. And that underspending has real costs: California is not producing enough college graduates and skilled workers.

The state has made bold promises on child care and early-childhood education that it hasn't adequately funded, leaving citizens to pay for the rest. Child care costs more than college tuition here. And housing costs more than just about anything, in part because we've spent so little on housing that we have a massive shortage that has pushed up home prices to more than twice the national average.

That the state has failed for generations to spend enough to build and maintain infrastructure is obvious in the degraded condition of roads, bridges, and waterways. Most recently, the state's failure to spend adequately to create strong-enough spillways at Oroville Dam is forcing California to make hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of repairs and upgrades before the next rainy season.

Our state's leaders understand the problem with underspending, but they haven't been successful at explaining the problem, credibly, to the public. It also hasn't helped that when state officials do need to spend big, they haven't been very good at it. Examples include the new Bay Bridge, with its delays, cost overruns, and questions about the integrity of its steel rods, and the high-speed rail project, where spending and construction have been so slow that many people think the project will die.

In recent budgets, Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature have sought to counter the state's tendency to underspend now and

pay later. They've made a great show of efforts to pay down debt. And Brown's current budget proposal would make a large advance contribution to pensions now, in order to reduce liabilities later. But that payment, unfortunately, is achieved by borrowing billions from a state special fund.

Brown has grown popular as a proselytizer of the credo that California can be managed on the cheap. That's appealing dogma for a state whose people struggle with a very high cost of living.

But the realities of our state should remind us that successfully running California on the cheap is a fantasy. And a very expensive one at that.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Community responds to teenager's letter

By Marie Wilson, Daily Herald

A Naperville North High School student touched a nerve and sparked a communitywide conversation when she posted an online petition seeking to change the "pressure culture" at her school.

That culture defines one narrow route to success and shames all who can't or don't want to follow it as failures, while instilling the belief "there is no worse fate than failure," junior Tessa Newman wrote late one night after one of her peers died by suicide.

She thought her petition would draw a perfunctory “thank you for sharing” and not much else from the school administration. But she underestimated the stir her words would create.

Read the whole story

What Trump’s ‘taxpayer first’ budget would mean for Nev.

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – President Trump’s first detailed budget to Congress will include Medicaid cuts that could impact thousands of Nevadans as well as federal funds to restart the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site.

The budget blueprint being unveiled Tuesday includes big ticket items the president wants, like \$54 billion for military weapons and \$2.6 billion for border security, including \$1.6 billion for the first portion of a southern wall.

It also eliminates many federal programs and cuts \$800 billion from Medicaid and \$193 billion from the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP, which provides food stamps to low-income people and families.

Read the whole story

Rare foxes spotted in Ore. may help Calif. population

By Kyle Spurr, Bend (Ore.) Bulletin

Little is known about the Sierra Nevada red fox, a rare subspecies of the small mammal of which there are fewer than 50 living in Northern California.

But a recently discovered population roaming the Oregon Cascades has excited wildlife biologists, who believe they have found a larger population.

The biologists hope to learn more about the foxes after capturing and radio-collaring two this month in a high-elevation forest near Mount Bachelor.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Tim Hiller, a wildlife biologist and founder of the Wildlife Ecology Institute, began studying the Sierra Nevada red fox in 2012.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Tahoe Vista Recreation Area's boat launch will be open Friday-Sunday until June 30 from 8am-6pm, then Wednesday-Sunday starting July 1. It is set to open May 26. And it will be open July 3-4.

- Truckee is having a meeting about the Envision Donner Pass Road Corridor Improvement Project on May 25 at 6pm at the airport.

- “The Smog of the Sea” will be shown June 16 at 7:30pm at Basecamp Hotel in South Lake Tahoe for \$10. It is a fundraiser for the League to Save Lake Tahoe. The movie delves into the threat of plastics in oceans.

- The Austin Lounge Lizards return to Piper’s Opera House in Virginia City on July 1. Doors open at 6:30pm, show at 7:30pm. Tickets are available **online**.

- Tahoe Resource Conservation District is putting its data on a new **website**.

Artist to give lecture, workshop at LTCC

Artist Erin Whitman will be at Lake Tahoe Community College for two days of events in June that the entire community is welcome to attend.

Whitman will present a lecture about her work and artistic inspirations on June 8 at 6pm in LTCC’s board room. She is also hosting a hands-on demonstration of her work on June 9 from 2-5pm in Room F101, located in the Fine Arts building.

Both events are free.

Whitman teaches painting at Cuyamaca College in Rancho San Diego. Her more recent artistic work involves large-scale paintings that explore the American landscape.

Deadline nears for SLT July 4 parade entries

South Lake Tahoe is looking for participants in the annual 4th of July parade.

All businesses, organizations, community members, sports teams and bands are invited to be in the parade. Floats are encouraged.

The parade starts that Tuesday at 10am.

It is free to participate. Parade applications are due June 13. Applications are **online**.

Ganong recaps downhill season, eager for 2018

By International Ski Federation

Downhiller Travis Ganong of Truckee has been racing on the most impressive World Cup courses for the past eight years, claiming two victories, one of them this season in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. We took the time to catch up with him and talk about his season, his career, but also the specificities of downhill ski racing.

Your 7th World Cup season concluded with a 12th place in the downhill standings and a 15th place in super G. It looks like there have been lot of up and downs, how would you rate your season? Are you satisfied with your performances?

Yeah it has been a season of highs and lows for me for sure, but I am really happy to end the season ranked in the top 15 in two events for the first time in my career. I had some really great performances and some other races where I pushed hard and took some chances that didn't end up working out. This season in downhill and super G the margins were so close that you had to push hard and take risk and when everything worked out, like in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, it was nice to stand on the top of the podium!

You mention it, one of the highlights was indubitably your second career win in the downhill in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Can you describe that special day?

Yeah, Garmisch-Partenkirchen was for sure a bittersweet day for me. I think for me this was the best downhill performance of my career, where I skied exactly how I wanted to and it all worked out, but also I started right after my teammate Steve Nyman who crashed and had a season ending injury. It was hard having such an amazing result for me and then going back to the hotel and seeing Nyman's condition, as well as watching all of the other crashes that day. The conditions of the downhill on that day were for sure on the limit of what is safe, and it was really tough to see all the injuries that day, but that's downhill ski racing and we have to push hard and ride that thin line to be competitive with a field that is so stacked right now. I wish the best to all the injured athletes and hope they all make successful returns to the World Cup downhill tour.

This win gave you confidence for the World Championships in St. Moritz, but things didn't go as planned or hoped there, as you finished 25th. What happened? Was the pressure higher as you were defending a silver medal from Vail/Beaver Creek?

Yeah, St. Moritz really didn't work out for me, and I was really hoping to follow up the World Cup win with something special, but that is downhill ski racing, where any given day,

anyone can win or lose. All the guys on tour right now are skiing so fast and it was tough all season being only four-tenths of a second behind the winner and barley making it into the top 10. I don't put any pressure on myself ever, but try to just focus on the little things that I can control, and then other than that, I just try to have fun and enjoy every moment that I get to spend in the mountains with a pair of skis on my feet. Also, it really was a tough week in St. Moritz with the weather and canceled training runs and races, and lowered starts, and I didn't handle the changing conditions very well, and that is something that I can really learn while moving forward. The downhill really did change completely when we couldn't start from the top, having no real speed for the top flat section of the course.

There is another special event coming up next year: the 2018 Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang. How are you preparing for this event? What are your goals?

Yeah, I am really excited to head back to South Korea and represent the USA again at the Olympics. I have great memories from Sochi where I had an amazing performance in the downhill and I hope to again try and fight for a medal. I have learned a lot about racing downhill and super G over the last few years on tour and now that I have that experience, I know how to better prepare to be more consistent on a weekly basis, and my goals are to try and stay healthy and strong all season long, and go into the games with as little knee pain as possible so I can push hard and ski how I want to. It has been really hard over the last few seasons managing my knee pain, but I am approaching my training and preparations a little differently this summer and hopefully it will work for next season.

In downhill, the density of the field is very high, with 11 different winners in the last 16 races. What makes the difference at the end of the day? What does it take to be the fastest?

Yeah, it's crazy how competitive downhill ski racing has become over the last years. There are so many top level skiers and anyone of them can win on any given day. This is really good for the sport I think, and it's making us athletes work harder than ever and ski on the limit to try and win, and that is elevating the sport and bringing ski racing to new levels. At the end of the day, since the margins are so small and since we are all pushing so hard, it is the athlete that makes the least amount of mistakes, while also taking the most risk that is going to win. It takes a very special performance, and that is why I think there have been so many different winners.

So taking risks is an inherent part of downhill. How do you deal with this? Is the danger always present in your mind?

Yes, downhill ski racing is a dangerous sport and I think that risk management is a very important part of finding success. Since it's an individual sport, no one is going to tell you when and where to take chance or to hold back, and that is why gaining experience is a huge key to learning how to manage the risk and find success. For my entire career on the World Cup, I have always tried to ski at an 80 percent level of risk or attack. Every year while doing this I try and gain more experience and stay healthy, and then the next season all of a sudden my new 80 percent risk level is at last seasons 100 percent level or higher. Over the seasons I have learned and been able to push harder and harder while still staying in a relatively safe range of risk, and now when I have a good performance while skiing in my comfort zone, I know that I can be faster than anyone. I hope to keep building on this through my career and continue to learn how to manage the risk.

During your time off the World Cup circuit, we often see you shredding the mountain free riding. Do you enjoy it so much for its similarities or its differences to alpine skiing?

I love to ski off piste as much as I can to get a break from skiing on ice and to bring some perspective to my life,

realizing how lucky I am to travel the world being a skier. I mean don't get me wrong, racing a classic downhill course going as fast as you can from top to bottom and sending it off of jumps is still the most fun thing I have found to do on a pair of skis, but I still love the difference that free riding brings, and think that it really compliments my ski racing. Going back to the risk management, I think that backcountry skiing relates to downhill ski racing in many ways as where you always have to manage the risk and dangers associated and ski within your comfort zone to manage the apparent danger and in the case of backcountry skiing, stay alive. It was really tough this winter being in Europe from December through February when the hills were green and watching all my buddies have day after day of bottomless powder skiing. I had serious FOMO scrolling through my Instagram feed every morning and seeing how good it was back home at Squaw Valley.

Squaw Valley is where you grew up and the World Cup returned to the Californian venue this season. What does it mean to you and how was the atmosphere? You had the chance to race and win the U.S. Championship there in 2013. How would it feel to be able to race a World Cup in your home yard?

It was so cool to bring the World Cup back to California and to show off my home ski area of Squaw Valley. There is so much skiing history in Lake Tahoe and the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and so much passion for the sport, and it's a shame that World Cup ski racing has been absent from the region for so long. Ski racing is growing as a sport in California where the Squaw Valley Ski Team alone has over 1,200 kids in the program, and it was so cool for all those kids and others to see firsthand what ski racing on the World Cup level really is. I am sure that this one race inspired so many of these kids, and it will really help fuel the fire of the next generation of racers from California. The atmosphere was off the charts as well. I have been to a lot of women's World Cup races to support my girlfriend Marie-Michele Gagnon, and this was by far the

biggest and loudest crowd that I have seen at a women's race. When Mikaela Shiffrin came down and won, everyone was on their feet and screaming as loud as they could, and it was a really special moment. I really hope that the FIS took note at how successful the Squaw Valley and Killington races were and that this will lead to a more fair World Cup Tour where the races are spread out evenly around the World.

Poisonous hemlock booming near Truckee River

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

The poisonous plant that killed Socrates is alive and booming along the Truckee River in Reno.

But if you don't chug a jug of hemlock tea or accidentally toss it in a salad you'll probably be OK.

Just to be safe, though, Washoe County officials took time Monday to highlight the plant's proliferation along a trail at Dorosktar Park on Reno's west side.

Read the whole story